

## Poplar Hill Volunteer Fire Department

Glen Alton Federal Funding Announcement

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August 16, 2005

Narrows, Virginia

I am pleased to return to Narrows this morning for the purpose of announcing the provision of two awards of federal funding which will be of benefit to Giles County. The first federal funding allotment will launch a major tourism development project in the County, and the second enable the purchase of a new equipment for some of the County's emergency first responders.

The historic Glen Alton property, which is located north of Pembroke in the New River Valley Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest, is an outstanding and underutilized natural and historic resource for our region. I want to use it to promote tourism in Giles County.

The Glen Alton site is characterized by a gently rolling terrain and possesses a variety of scenic, natural and cultural resources including mountain views, wetlands, rivers, ponds and streams and the historic lodge, barns and caretaker's house which date back to the early 20th Century.

The property is owned by the U.S. Forest Service. It has been in use for many years by local residents for hunting, fishing, bird watching and, more recently, wedding receptions, but it is not sufficiently developed to accommodate larger groups of visitors wishing to explore the pristine and rustic scenery which abounds in this county. I want to facilitate that larger use.

In 2003, my office joined with the U.S. Forest Service and Giles County officials in the establishment of a planning committee to explore options for the development of the Glen Alton property. The committee's work resulted in a comprehensive and detailed design proposal for the property's future use.

Using the Glen Alton design proposal as a framework, I submitted a request for federal funding for the Glen Alton development project, and I am pleased today to announce that Congress has honored my request and has appropriated \$800,000 in federal funding for the development of the Glen Alton Recreation Area. The federal funding was included in highway legislation which was signed into law by the President just last week.

This funding will be used to launch a far-reaching stabilization, rehabilitation and development initiative at the Glen Alton

property. Although many residents from Giles and the surrounding communities visit the property each year, the buildings have fallen into disrepair and much of the property has become overgrown. Glen Alton is Giles County's diamond in the rough. With the federal funding being announced today and the collective efforts of the U.S. Forest Service, federal and state governments and Giles County, we will begin to realize the potential which exists there.

The project will first focus on the restoration and rehabilitation of the historic lodge and caretaker's house and the surrounding property which have sustained significant water damage and fallen into disrepair over the years. The Forest Service will first remove the water damaged portions of both structures, which received new roofs last year to protect against further deterioration, and install new plumbing and electrical wiring. The restroom facilities in both structures will also be upgraded. The lodge will be renovated to serve as a visitors' center, and the caretaker's house will be used for housing for volunteers who will assist in the maintenance of Glen Alton.

The funding will also be used to improve public access to the site, including the construction of a parking area. Currently, no suitable parking facilities exist for visitors to the property. The access road which leads to Glen Alton will also be upgraded. In particular, the two bridges along the roadway will be stabilized and improved.

Three ponds which are located on the property will be cleaned and rehabilitated as part of the Glen Alton project. Both the reflecting and fishing ponds will be drained and cleaned, and the dams which feed into the ponds will be upgraded. In addition, the stonework which surrounds the reflecting pond will be replaced.

The construction of a wildlife viewing trail will also be completed. Work has already begun to construct the trail which loops past one of the barns, down to the creek, skirts a wetland area and continues along the meadow's edge. The federal appropriation I have just announced will be used to complete the trail's construction, and the Forest Service expects that it will be finished early next year. The trail will be surfaced with an aggregate stone material to enable wheelchair accessibility and will provide an excellent opportunity for birding enthusiasts or for visitors who want to take in the impressive plant life at the property.

Plans for the future development of Glen Alton do not stop there. The Forest Service will also erect informational kiosks and bulletin boards at specific points on the site. Connector trails are planned to enable easier access from Glen Alton to the Locust Knob and Dixon Branch Trails, the Alleghany Trail which leads to the Hanging Rock Fire Tower and the Appalachian Trail which crosses the top of Peters Mountain. And an extensive system of biking, hiking and horse trails is planned for the southern end of the property. The Forest Service also plans to construct a large public restroom facility and picnic area near the lodge and to upgrade the camping facilities located near the Glen Alton property. The horse barn on the property will also be converted into a children's play area.

Our announcement today represents a major step taken for the development of the Glen Alton Recreation area, but our work in realizing the site's tourism potential is just beginning. As these and other projects take shape, I will be seeking the appropriate federal resources to ensure that Glen Alton receives the assistance that is necessary to further develop the tourism economy of Giles County.

I bring today additional good news for Giles County in the form of a second provision of federal funding.

Volunteer fire fighters and rescue squad members are the first line of our defense in coping with fires and emergencies in rural areas. They are generous members of our communities who risk personal safety for the public good. Most of the volunteers are in departments that protect fewer than 25,000 people, and more than one-half are located in small rural departments that protect fewer than 2,500 people.

Local funding for updated equipment is often difficult to obtain in our small communities. Due to the extensive cost of new equipment, many volunteer departments seek used equipment, often in the form of surplus equipment from federal and state governments.

Today, I am pleased to announce that, at my request, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through its Rural Development Agency, has agreed to provide federal funding in the amount of \$30,000 to the Poplar Hill Volunteer Fire Department for the purchase of new firefighting equipment. Of that total amount, \$11,000 is being provided as a federal grant, and \$19,000 is being provided in the form of a low-interest federal loan.

With the federal funds, the Department will purchase extrication equipment which will be attached to the pumper truck used by the firefighters. The equipment will be used during automobile accident situations when passengers are trapped inside a vehicle following a crash. The federal funding will also be used to purchase one automatic defibrillator and new nozzles for the Department's fire hoses. Six new sets of firefighting turnout gear will also be purchased. The gear includes the pants, shirts, coats, coveralls, helmets, goggles, boots and gloves which firefighters must wear to protect themselves while fighting a fire.

The Poplar Hill Volunteer Fire Department is staffed by 21 active members, all of whom work on a voluntary basis. The Department provides fire protection to a 34 square mile area of Southwest Giles County which stretches to both the Bland County and Pulaski County borders. The new equipment will enable these volunteers to respond more efficiently to any emergency calls they may receive.

I want to express my appreciation to the community leaders who have contributed to the success of these two projects: Cindy Schiffer, Ranger for the New River Valley Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest, for her outstanding efforts in support of the Glen Alton project; Todd Jones, Fire Chief of the Poplar Hill Volunteer Fire Department; Travis Jackson, Area Director for the Rural Development Agency, for his assistance in obtaining the federal funding for the Poplar Hill Volunteer Fire Department; and Chris McClarney, Giles County Administrator, for the work he has performed on these two projects and other initiatives which will advance Giles County.

I am pleased to celebrate the approval of these two provisions of federal funding for Giles County. The development of the Glen Alton property promises to stimulate new economic growth for Giles County and will become a major tourism asset. The federal funding for Poplar Hill Volunteer Fire Department will provide the firefighters with the appropriate protection and equipment they need to protect us.